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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 PRISTINA 000760

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PINR](#) [SOCI](#) [KV](#) [UNMIK](#)  
SUBJECT: KOSOVO: NORTHERN SERB LEADERS HARDEN POSITION,  
ACKNOWLEDGE "PARALLELISM" AS A POLICY GOAL

Classified By: Chief of Mission Tina Kaidanow for reasons 1.4 (b), (d)

11. (C) SUMMARY. There were no surprises in our recent meetings with hardline northern Kosovo Serb leaders. We emphasized the leaders' responsibility for security and sought to maintain open lines of communication. For their part, our interlocutors were consistent in asserting that Kosovo Serbs will not initiate violence in the tense period after resolution of final status, though they made no promises about maintaining a Serb police presence in the multi-ethnic Kosovo Police Service. To the contrary, Serb National Council (SNC) leader Milan Ivanovic emphasized parallelism (and in particular the return of Serbian army and police units) as the best option for Kosovo Serbs. Though less extreme-sounding figures such as SNC Mitrovica chief Nebojsa Jovic and Zvecan mayor Dragisa Milovic see the risk for Serbs in the south if they boycott the upcoming Kosovo elections, no one, including international officials, foresees anything but an almost total Serb boycott on November 17. While our Serb interlocutors presented differing faces, all appeared confident the north -- and implicitly the Serb enclaves in the south -- will remain firmly under their control. Increasingly, the Serb leadership of Kosovo, guided by Belgrade, is articulating a policy of total separation from Kosovo institutions, a provocation sure to -- and perhaps designed to -- goad ethnic Albanians into rash counter-moves. END SUMMARY.

Message from USOP

12. (C) Poloffs met with hardline northern Serb leaders, including Serb National Council (SNC) leader Milan Ivanovic, SNC North Mitrovica chief Nebojsa Jovic, and Zvecan mayor Dragisa Milovic on October 19 and 25, to emphasize both the need for open communication and the importance of maintaining security in the coming months. USOP reminded key Serb leaders that primary responsibility for security and stability in the north rests with them and the organizations they control. We urged them to ensure that there be no violence or provocations around the November 17 elections or in the period following, as the status resolution process again takes on serious momentum.

## Open to dialogue

¶3. (C) Not surprisingly, Ivanovic (along with his "media chief" Radomir Nekojevic) pursued his usual hard stance on all issues, although he agreed that open lines of communication would be important in the coming period. Milovic and Jovic appeared even more open to communication and stressed that they wanted to maintain contact with USOP, regardless of the final status settlement. Milovic spoke about his municipality's need for economic assistance, and thanked USOP and USAID for past projects, while Jovic said repeatedly that increased dialogue and contact were vital, given current tensions in the run-up to final status.

## UDI

¶4. (C) Ivanovic made it very clear that he and other hardliners will consider any declaration or form of independence for Kosovo illegitimate, and he parroted Belgrade's threat to cut off relations with countries or institutions recognizing an independent Kosovo. Jovic and Milovic were more measured, avoiding threats altogether, but affirming clearly that no Serb would ever accept an independent Kosovo. Nevertheless, neither threatened to cut off contact should independence be the outcome.

## Security - "We won't start things"

¶5. (C) Both Ivanovic and Jovic claimed that Kosovo Serbs would not initiate any violence. As in the past, Ivanovic alleged that Kosovo Albanians are "completely" under American control, which in their view makes the U.S. responsible for

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provocations or violence from the Albanian side. Jovic was less accusatory, saying "you will have no problems from us" and that politicians on both sides need to speak out to reduce tensions. Both declared that northern Serbs would "protect themselves" if all else failed, with Ivanovic warning that "if KFOR fails again, our state (Serbia) will prevent a pogrom." Jovic took a similar line, but displayed a more positive estimate of KFOR's ability to maintain order. Nonetheless, he discussed openly what he said was the Serbs' strategy of goading the Albanians into violent action: "This part of the game will last a long time, and the side which makes the first mistake will lose. We will not make the first mistake."

## Elections

¶6. (C) The leaders we spoke to, along with international interlocutors working in the north, confirmed the widely-held view that Serbs would boycott the upcoming November 17 central and municipal elections in Kosovo. All we spoke with were also in agreement that Serbs are "not motivated" to vote, even if there were no pressure from Belgrade. Ivanovic complained that UNMIK had not consulted the SNC about elections, but both he and Jovic said they would not prevent any Serbs from voting. Jovic, however, added that he would be out on election day explaining to people why they should not vote. Ivanovic did not respond when asked about a rumored attempt -- at his own urging, as well as that of fellow hardliner Marko Jaksic -- to schedule parallel municipal elections on November 11, but Jovic blamed "some individuals" within the SNC for pushing such a plan. (Comment: To our knowledge, the idea of holding parallel municipal elections around the time of Kosovo elections has apparently been discarded by Belgrade -- an interesting slap at the northern Serb leadership, not acknowledged by Ivanovic -- but will almost certainly be scheduled for spring 2008, when Serbian municipal elections will likely take place. End Comment.)

## Effects of a boycott

¶7. (C) When asked what would happen in the southern, Serb-majority municipalities of Strpce and Novo Brdo in the event that Albanians gained control after a Serb boycott of the elections, Ivanovic dismissed the potential for trouble, again saying that Serbs would not start violence and that Albanians could be kept under absolute American control. Jovic and Milovic, however, admitted that sitting Serb administrations in those municipalities would be at risk of losing their seats to newly elected Albanian or Serb micro-party candidates and asked us to make sure that KFOR would protect Serbs south of the Ibar.

#### Strengthening of parallel structures

¶8. (C) In a harbinger of the northern leadership's strategy post-status, Ivanovic clearly echoed Serbian Minister for Kosovo Slobodan Samardzic's recent comments that Serbia would increase the size, reach, and scope of parallel government institutions for Kosovo Serbs after status, including areas south of the Ibar. Both he and Milovic argued that Serb institutions in the north, such as the hospital, university, and telecommunications service, functioned more effectively than "Albanian" institutions elsewhere in Kosovo. Flanked by posters calling for the return of the Serbian police and army to Serbia's "southern province" in the name of UNSCR 1244, Ivanovic told us that "only our institutions" can protect Serbs in Kosovo. When asked whether parallelism would be a dramatic provocation for Kosovo Albanians, Ivanovic declared the current division of Mitrovica a "model of multiethnicity" for Kosovo, saying that the two sides lived next to each other without violence. His colleague Nekojevic told us "they (Albanians) had their parallel structures in the 1990's, and we will now have ours. We are prepared for this."

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#### Image of Moderation

¶9. (C) Jovic, as he often does when speaking with international interlocutors, portrayed himself as a reasonable moderate within the SNC, calling for "responsibility" from all leaders and for internationals to deal only with "serious" politicians. He discounted reports of violent and provocative threats from hardline figures as the words of "individuals, not the organization," going on to warn that "some people say we should respond to Albanians waving flags on the south bank of the Ibar with our uniformed MUP (Serbian Ministry of Internal Affairs) police and Serbian flags, but these are not serious people."

#### Comment

¶10. (C) Our hardline Serb interlocutors were polite and well-behaved during our meetings, asserting repeatedly that they will not be the ones to instigate violence. This tells us they are confident of retaining control of northern Kosovo -- and by implication, the southern Serb enclaves, as well -- regardless of what final status may bring. With direct guidance from Belgrade, Kosovo's northern Serb leadership is now boldly articulating a strategy of consolidating what amounts to a Serb entity in Kosovo, with its own set of governing institutions, its own logistical and funding chain back to Belgrade via north Mitrovica, and its own set of political imperatives, aimed largely at de facto separation from Kosovo.

¶11. (C) Comment, cont. We have very little influence to stop or reverse this process and -- as the Serbs wisely divine -- the intensified pace of constructing their parallel governing arrangements will increasingly be a red flag in front of the ethnic Albanian bull. The robust posture of both KFOR and UNMIK police in the north, as well as strenuous international efforts to exert control over hothead Albanian politicians, will be necessary to keep things calm during the overheated status and post-status period. We are

underscoring to all interlocutors, Serb and Albanian, our determination and resolve to maintain security, noting specifically that it is their responsibility to ensure the situation remains within specified boundaries no matter what the provocation. End comment.

KAIDANOW